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Congressman

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## CHAIRMAN STEVE BUYER

### Opening Remarks

### Military Personnel Subcommittee Hearing DOD Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP)

In March 1998 the Department of Defense implemented its Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program, or AVIP, as part of an overall force protection strategy. AVIP was designed to protect deployed forces against their vulnerability to attack by one of the 10 or more nations known or suspected of having weaponized anthrax for use as a weapon of mass destruction.

Last week, the subcommittee heard the classified details of the threat. Today the subcommittee will turn its attention to a range of issues and concerns that have been raised about the AVIP Program.

Many service members and others outside the services have expressed serious reservations about the program, especially about the safety of the vaccine and its effectiveness as a protection against weaponized anthrax. Questions have also been raised regarding the corporation which is the sole manufacturer of the vaccine. That company had to undertake a major renovation to prepare to manufacture the large volume of vaccine required by the Department and has already had to re-negotiate its contract to avoid financial collapse.

From the outset, this subcommittee has had concerns about the Department's system for tracking the immunization status of individual service members. This immunization tracking system is showing signs it may not be up to the task of recording, storing and reliably retrieving the huge volume of information that will be created by immunizing 2.4 million troops.

Immunizing reserve component personnel is already presenting special challenges. In fact, there is some preliminary evidence that the shot regimen among reserves is falling behind schedule.

There have been claims in the media that hundreds of service members are choosing to leave the military rather than take this vaccine. If true, this could have a significant negative effect on the services' ability to carry out their contingency missions and even their routine deployments.

(More)

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Given these concerns, it is clear to me that a careful, fact based, review of the program is justified. That is why we are here today. We are also here to begin the assessment of whether the benefits and risks of continuing this vaccination program outweigh the risks of delaying or stopping the program. We have asked these two panels of witnesses to testify. Our first panel represents key leaders in the Department of Defense. The second panel is composed of troops who have had to make the decision of whether to take the vaccine or not.

I see that several members outside the committee have joined us for this hearing. I appreciate your interest and I will do my best to make sure you get a chance to ask questions of the witnesses today.

Before I introduce our first panel of witnesses, let me offer Mr. Abercrombie an opportunity for any opening remarks he would desire to make.

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